

Mr. Tyler Schroeder, Planning Manager  
Whatcom County Planning and Development Services  
5280 Northwest Drive  
Bellingham, Washington 98226-9097

October 25, 2012

Dear Mr. Schroeder:

On May 8, 2012, I wrote you in my role as the School Health Officer for the Ferndale School District. Today, I write you as a private citizen living in Bellingham. In that earlier letter, I expressed concern that there was little, if any, information coming from the Gateway Pacific proponents or local officials about health issues that might impact students in our school district. That letter was not written as a "pro" or "con" letter on behalf of the school district—it was simply a request that certain public health concerns be addressed within Whatcom County's study of the proposal.

In this letter, I do take a stance in opposition to Gateway Pacific's proposal. I do so on the basis of the same health concerns that I raised in May. I have seen no substantive information from Gateway Pacific—other than slogans, commercials, and vague promises—that addresses the potential harm caused to the citizens of Bellingham or Whatcom County. My concerns are the following:

1. Coal Dust. Each uncovered train car will lose between 500 pounds and a ton of coal dust en route. Exposure to coal dust is particularly harmful (e.g., asthma, wheezing, increased cancer risks, increased exposure to cadmium) to children and older people.
2. Diesel Particulates. The increased number of trains through Bellingham will result in a significant increase in airborne diesel particulates. Increased exposure to such particulates leads to increased health risks (e.g., pulmonary, cardiovascular, cancers, asthma).
3. Noise Exposure. The increased number of trains through Bellingham will result in a significant increase in harsh sound exposure—especially for those people living and/or working near the train tracks. While not all people are susceptible to such noise disruptions, some people are. There is strong medical research showing that exposure to harsh repetitive noise can trigger in some people a variety of health symptoms (e.g., cardiovascular problems, cognitive impairment, sleep disturbance, fatigue, hypertension, arrhythmia, stress/anxiety/depression).

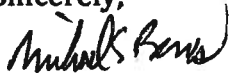
4. Delayed Emergency Medical Response Times. There has been a lot of debate about the length of the trains and the amount of time that it will take for the trains to pass through street crossings. What I know at this point is that the current shorter coal trains take 4 to 6 minutes to cross some of the Ferndale crossings. Assuming the 18 daily trains will be longer than the current trains, the crossings will take even longer. What will be the impact on citizens when emergency medical responders are unable or delayed in getting to citizens experiencing health traumas (e.g., assaults, heart attacks, seizures, strokes)?

5. Increased Pollution from the Burning of Coal in China. This is a concern that I didn't mention in the earlier May letter. Climatologists at the University of Washington have recently concluded that the Pacific Northwest will experience increased air pollution from the burning of coal that will travel through Gateway Pacific's terminal to China. Those climatologists now calculate that it will take approximately 10 days for those burned pollutants to travel airborne from China to Washington State.

There are so many other negative issues related to the proposal—I'll let those with greater information about those things (e.g., employment, roads, bridges, the risk to Bellingham's tourist industry, tribal opposition) weigh in on those matters.

The bottom line for me is that Whatcom County must insure that public health issues are made a central focus in a full scoping process. The above-listed and other public health issues must be studied through transparent, thorough, evidence-based, and unbiased analyses. Anything less would be unconscionable and a dereliction of the County's duty to protect its citizens.

Sincerely,



Michael S. Berres, Ph.D

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Ms. Kelli Linville, Bellingham Mayor  
Mr. Jack Louws, Whatcom County Executive  
Mr. Ted Sturdevant, Washington Department of Ecology  
Dr. Greg Stern, Director, Whatcom County Department of Health